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Editorials

Wrong targets

William J. Casey, the CIA director, has been doing a slow burn for years over what he fancies as transgressions by journalists covering the intelligence community. A couple of years ago, it may be recalled, he unsuccessfully petitioned the FCC to find ABC-TV in violation of the fairness doctrine for reporting that the CIA had attempted to arrange the assassination of an unwanted partner. His temperature has risen by several degrees since the FCC turned him down.

Now Casey has asked the Justice Department to begin a criminal prosecution of NBC-TV for mentioning on the *Today* show that a former National Security Agency employee, on trial as a spy for Russia, was accused of revealing secrets about the use of U. S. submarines to intercept Russian communications. Casey was also considering whether to ask Justice to prosecute the *Washington Post* for publishing a longer version of the same story. As published, the story omitted some material that appeared in an original version to which Casey had raised objections during a meeting with senior editors of the *Post*.

To put this in context, it must be noted that Casey is reflecting a general attitude among Washington officials who yearn for a tamer press. Indeed the President of the United States in person telephoned Katharine Graham, head of the Washington Post Co., to ask that the original version of the *Post's* spy story be killed. Throughout the military, there has been a conviction, ever since Vietnam, that the press is less an adversary than an enemy.

It must also be noted that the Fourth and Fifth Estates have brought some of the criticism upon themselves. Although the CIA attempted a gross abuse of governmental power when it tried to get ABC cited for a fairness violation, it remains an undisputed fact that ABC went on the air two nights with the story of CIA connivance in attempted assassination and waited nearly two months to admit that the charge could not be confirmed.

A different form of journalistic enterprise, the NBC News interview with a fugitive accused of terrorism (BROADCASTING, May 12), drew mixed reviews among journalists themselves. To officials such as Casey the stipulated concealment of the whereabouts of a man wanted by three governments and carrying a \$250,000 price on his head cannot be excused.

The guess here is that cooler heads will prevail in the Justice Department and that neither NBC nor the *Washington Post* will be taken to court over their reports of the spy trial. The evidence at hand suggests that neither disclosed any information that was not already widely known. If at some point there was a compromise of legitimately secret material, the leaker in the government ought to be the target for today.

How about attacking the problem at its source?